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MILTON'S CONCEPTION OF THE  
TEMPTATION AS PORTRAYED  
IN PARADISE REGAINED.

MILTON'S second epic, it will be remembered, was an afterthought, the result of a suggestion from one of his friends: "What hast thou to say of *Paradise Regained*?" Then Milton turned from the old Hebrew legend that had furnished so admirable a framework for his more expanded mythology, to find in the Gospel accounts of the life of Jesus the material for his new poem. Paradise had been lost to mankind through the weakness of the first Adam in yielding to the wiles of Satan; it had been regained by the strength of the second Adam in resisting his wiles. Here was the *motif* for the new poem. And right to hand were the accounts by Matthew and Luke of the ignominious failure of Satan's three attempts upon Jesus. Expand these and you have your epic poem.

But there was a radical difference in the materials out of which Milton wrought his two epics. The story of Genesis is primitive man's first account of himself and the world; everything is objective and symbolic. According to Milton, Adam is a healthy boy lost in wonder at the revelations of his five senses. His Creator is himself writ large. The Son of God is a theological shadow thrown back, that possesses no personality, and need not square with anything historical. The Omnipotent is surrounded by angels near enough like Himself to be governed by the same psychological laws. Only one among these types seems to possess any real individuality, and that is Satan. Under these conditions Milton can give free rein to his imagination without much heed to the later development of mankind.

But in *Paradise Regained* Milton enters new territory. The Christian Gospels are not pre-historic folk-lore; they spring from an historical personality. And in making the Son of God of *Paradise Lost* the second Adam of *Paradise Regained*, Milton passes from the mythical and symbolic to the real and subjective. The second Adam, the theological Christ, is the historical Jesus; and incidents upon which the epic is based have come down to us as real personal experiences. This new

material would seem to demand a different treatment. Satan is no doubt the same as in *Paradise Lost*, and we should expect him to go about his business in much the same way. But the temptations which are to form the epic are a part of human psychology, and before they can be amplified they must be understood. If Milton does not understand them, but simply uses them as new material that may be worked in somehow with the old, then the second epic becomes merely a repetition of the first—we have the same Satan and the same impersonal Son of God, and the only difference is in the ending.

This, it seems to me, is the criticism of the Rev. Stopford Brooke in his little primer on Milton. He thinks the poem an attempt to do again what had been better done in *Paradise Lost*. "The error is not in the sameness of the subject, but in the treatment of the same subject a second time along the same line."

In developing the temptations Milton follows the order of Luke. Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness; he fasts for forty days, at the end of which he is hungered. Then occurs the first temptation—that he turn the stone into bread. Milton paraphrases this in nineteen verses, after which Jesus and Satan converse to the end of the first book. Midway in the second book Satan returns and renews the temptation, this time with an elaborate banquet of his own contriving.

"The first temptation," says Mr. Brooke, "is treated so lightly that we see that Milton had no idea of its meaning. The conversation which follows, being founded on no clear view of the situation, is heavy and loses the solemnity of the hour."

He severely censures Satan's second attempt:

... "the truth is" Milton not having formed a clear idea of the temptation, tried to get one by repeating himself, and the Nemesis of unintelligent repetition fell upon him."

Milton's treatment of the second temptation meets with Mr. Brooke's approval. Satan offers Jesus the kingdoms of the world in fief, which Jesus indignantly rejects. Milton expands this temptation under four heads: the appeal to riches, glory, dominion, and wis-

dom—all as forms of earthly power. Says Mr. Brooke :

"Milton understands this, and his success in this part of the poem is owing to his clear conception of his subject. For when a poet possesses that, he works with unconscious rightness; when he does not, his work will be wrong in treatment, in ornament, in everything, and the more he attempts to finish it, the more wrong it will become."

In the third temptation Satan invites Jesus to cast himself down from the pinnacle of the temple, assuring him of divine aid, but is repulsed as before. Milton paraphrases this briefly, and then describes the fall of Satan, who, "smitten with amazement," "fell whence he looked to see his victor fall." This description is expanded by allusions to Antæus and to the Sphinx, both of whom suffered a like misfortune. In this temptation, says Mr. Brooke, as in the first,

"Milton is driven into sensationalism because he did not understand his subject. The additions he makes to the story in the Gospel violate the meaning of the story. Even with the addition he could find no ideas on which his imagination could truly employ itself in this temptation, and he only glances over it."

As Mr. Brooke does not tell us what he conceives to be the true interpretation of the first and the third temptations, I have endeavored to discover his point of view, or at least to reach an interpretation that will explain Milton's alleged failure.

No event in Biblical history has led to more conflicting explanations, some of them over subtle, many of them childish, some even ludicrous. But we soon see that we can divide all commentators roughly into two classes :—

1. Those who take the temptation literally and from the objective point of view.
2. Those who interpret it symbolically and from the subjective point of view.

Those who hold the objective view regard Satan as a real, objective personality, whose actions need bear no relation to the previous mental condition of the one tempted. Mental processes begin only when the tempter appears, and the next temptation will depend upon the caprices of the tempter, not upon the mental state of the tempted. Those who hold

the subjective view regard the temptation as a real struggle in Jesus' own mind, of which the Scriptural narrative is a symbolical version as related in Eastern fashion by Jesus himself to his disciples.

The earliest commentators, of course, held to the literal and objective view. But the absurdities and inconsistencies of this explanation soon broke it down. As early as the time of Milton we find in the writings of the French theologian, Samuel Bochart, some question as to whether Jesus was led to the mountains by the devil, *re ipsa*, or only in imagination; and the discussions of a Dutch theologian of the same period (Spanheim) reveal the fact that the temptation was by some considered merely a vision. But in England the literal, objective view seems to have prevailed till about the middle of the eighteenth century, when John Mason, a dissenting divine, maintained in a sermon that the temptation was a trance, dream, or vision, in which the devil painted the scenes. But this diabolic-vision theory was no very radical change, for it still preserved the devil. "Whether Christ's being tempted by the devil passed in vision or not," said Bishop Warburton, "the reality of the agency is the same on either supposition."

The first thorough-going attack on the prevailing literalism was made by Hugh Farmer, a liberal divine, in 1761.<sup>1</sup> According to his theory the temptation was a

"*divine* vision with a wise and benevolent intention, as symbolical predictions and representations of the principal trials and difficulties attending Christ's public ministry." "The devil was not really and personally present with Christ, but only in mental representation, and consequently could act no part in this whole transaction."

From this view of Farmer's it is obviously but a step to the purely subjective treatment by modern theologians and historians, in which the devil is wholly eliminated as anything more than a symbol for the weakness of the flesh.

This brief sketch of the development of the several theories clearly indicates that Milton's conception of the temptation must have been the literal and objective interpretation of his

<sup>1</sup> *An Inquiry into the Nature and Design of Christ's Temptation.*

day. And to this view he was already predisposed, since he brought to the work the real Satan of his first epic. A comparison of his treatment of the temptations with the explanations given by commentators of the objective school shows that he practically agreed with them. In all objective explanations there is bound to occur a certain subjective element that is part of the Scripture narrative—despair, distrust, presumption. But always more important than this is the feeling that the real sin consisted in accepting a hint from Satan simply because he *was* Satan. Milton shows this feeling in his repetition of the first temptation. Satan asks,

"Tell me, if food were now before thee set,  
Wouldst thou not eat?"

To which Jesus replies,

"Therafter as I like  
The giver."

If, therefore, Milton fails to understand the first and the third temptations, so do all who interpret the temptation objectively, and Mr. Brooke must belong to the subjective school.

According to the subjective explanation the form of the temptation is symbolic and represents a real struggle in Jesus' own mind. For, says Professor Sanday,<sup>2</sup>

"Only in the form of symbols was it possible to present to the men of that day a struggle so fought out in the deepest recesses of the soul."

The great difference between an objective and a subjective temptation as defined above becomes apparent. The subjective temptation, if the tempted one be at all rational, must possess a well defined unity, it must centre around some supreme desire or problem. Not so with the objective temptation. The wily Satan as a real, objective personality may seize upon one expedient after another with no apparent connection between them. This is well illustrated in Milton's two epics. In both Satan is the tempter, in both he is the real, objective personality, free to vary his means as suits his fancy; but there is a difference between the two poems, and that difference accounts for the success of the one and the failure of the other. In *Paradise Lost*, although Satan is free to choose his means,

he is restricted to one definite object, to tempt our first parents to eat the apple, and all his efforts as directed toward that object must therefore possess unity. Not so with *Paradise Regained*. The subjective interpretation, the only one that could give unity to the temptation, not being understood by Milton, the various attempts of Satan are seemingly without connection, the transitions are lame, and the unity of the poem is lost.

But why did Milton understand the second temptation and develop it so well, while he failed with the first and the third? Let us consider the subjective explanation more closely. The instances related are regarded as representing actual mental experiences, things that were real problems to Jesus. Born at a time when Israel looked to the promised Messiah for deliverance from the Roman yoke, Jesus must naturally have shared the aspirations of his countrymen. The growing consciousness of some high mission, the assurances of the prophets, the dire need of his people, all forced upon him the question, Might not he be the promised Messiah? And the impetuous John stood ready to proclaim him, and the populace was eager to follow the deliverer who, coming on the clouds of Heaven, was to destroy his enemies by the breath of his nostrils. But Jesus must soon have found his nature at variance with this popular conception of the Messiah? In Isaiah, Zechariah, and the Psalms he found another Messiah, the lowly, loving Messiah of the poor, the humble, the wretched, more consistent with his conception of God as a God of Love. But to reject the rôle of the first Messiah meant to disappoint his dearest friends and begin a life that might end in persecution and death. Might he not therefore enact the two rôles; first inaugurate the new kingdom as the conquering Messiah, then continue it as the peaceful, loving Messiah? Therein lay the struggle, and in his perplexity he retired to the wilderness to fight it out alone. And the three temptations are all directly related to this struggle. The second is the central one: Shall he not deliver Israel from political oppression before he tries to free the individual from himself—his true mission? And the two other temptations are merely the means to

<sup>2</sup> The Hastings Bible Dictionary, vol. ii, "Jesus Christ."

this end. Shall he prostitute his spiritual gifts to making bread of stones? Shall he leap from the temple and light unharmed among the astonished multitude, thus winning their adherence by a feat of magic—another prostitution of spiritual gifts? The result is decisive. He casts aside all thought of political reform—he will devote himself to his proper mission, the moral and spiritual elevation of the individual. To accomplish this he need not turn a stone into bread, or win the populace by the cheap magic of an aerial flight.

So closely, then, are the three temptations related, that to understand one is to understand all. If Milton did not understand the first and the last, he could not have rightly understood the second. But the second was so well suited to objective treatment that Milton could not fail to see its possibilities, and he made the most of them, working, as Mr. Brooke has well said, with "unconscious" rightness.

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#### THE ORIGIN OF THE WORD "RÄZEL" IN GOETHE'S DICH- TUNG UND WAHRHEIT.

In the tenth book of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*,<sup>1</sup> Goethe tells us how he assumed the disguise of a young countryman in order to mystify the good people at the Sesenheim parsonage.

"So fand ich's lustig seine dichterischen Augenbrauen mit einem gebrannten Korkstöpsel mässig nachzuahmen und sie in der Mitte zusammenzuziehen, um mich bei meinem rätselhaften Vornehmen auch äusserlich zum *Räzel* zu bilden."

At first reading one is apt to look upon the form *Räzel* as merely an old-fashioned spelling for *Rätsel* = riddle. *Räzel* = *Rätsel* "riddle" is common enough in the eighteenth century (Weigand, *Deutsches Wörterbuch* ii). In this sense the word has often been taken. Oxford in his English version of Goethe's autobiography (London, 1848) translates "riddle," and Jacques Porchat (*Mémoires de Goethe*, Paris, 1862) translates "*une autre énigme*." German commentators, too, have sometimes

<sup>1</sup> Weimar edition, v. 27, p. 361.

taken the word in the sense of riddle. The older American editions of this part of Goethe's autobiography (those of Professor Hart and Professor Huss) write, respectively, *Räthsel* and *Rätsel*, and take it in the sense of riddle. At least, that must be inferred from the orthography and the absence of any comment.

But the word occurs also in the ninth book.<sup>2</sup> In characterizing his table-companion Meyer at Strassburg Goethe says:

"seiner ganzen Physiognomie gab es einen eigenen Ausdruck, dass er ein "*Räzel*" war, d. h. dass seine Augenbrauen über der Nase zusammenstiessen, welches bei einem schönen Gesicht immer einen angenehmen Ausdruck von Sinnlichkeit hervorbringt."

Here it is clear that *Räzel* has a meaning quite distinct from *Rätsel* = riddle. Loeper<sup>3</sup> and Düntzer<sup>4</sup> recognized that the word in book 10 must have the same meaning as here. They connect it with *Rad*, and in support of this etymology Loeper quotes the form *Rädselbrauen*. Professor von Jagemann in his edition of *Dichtung und Wahrheit* after giving the correct meaning of *Räzel* in book 10, adds: "the origin of this expression is obscure."

Heyne (D. W. viii, 197) does not know whether *Räzel* in the sense used by Goethe has any connection with *Rätsel* = riddle. However, he does not treat Goethe's *Räzel* as a separate word. This is what he says:

"rätsel, räzel, von einem menschen mit zusammengewachsenen augenbrauen."

After quoting the two passages from *Dichtung und Wahrheit* given above he continues:

"ob diese bedeutung mit der vorigen (that is: *rätsel* = riddle) zusammenhängt, erhellt nicht. in der Oberpfalz sind rätsel hausgeister, kobolde, die rätselöcher bei Roding unterirdische gänge, wo die rätseln aus- und eingingen und hausarbeiten verrichteten."

Sanders also gives Goethe's *Räzel* under *Rätsel* = riddle. He quotes our two passages and several from other authors where the word refers to a person whose eyebrows meet, but offers no comment. Hoffmann<sup>5</sup> gives "*Räzel*" under a special heading, making it masculine.

<sup>2</sup> Weimar edition, v. 27, p. 232.

<sup>3</sup> Hempl'sche Ausgabe v. 21, p. 229.

<sup>4</sup> Erläuterungen zu D. und W., 2nd part, p. 102.

<sup>5</sup> *Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache*, Leipzig, 1857, v. 4, p. 494.